

Policy Brief:

Upgrading Professional Competencies in the Built Environment to Address the Needs of Host and Displaced Communities



regard
rebuilding after displacement

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Statement of Issue

Displacement is an increasing concern in many parts of the world. This policy brief summarises the findings of a long-term research effort made to address the role of built environment in displacement contexts. The underpinning study was carried out in Estonia, Sri Lanka, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK). In the context of increasing displacement, the role of built environment in addressing its associated challenges are explored. Specific issues include living in poor environments, camp management, host families, livelihood opportunities, social cohesion, coping capacity of the displaced, protracted displacement, cultural diversity and inclusive societies. Recommendations are presented in addressing these challenges from the perspective of built environment interventions and developing the competencies of related professionals.

Background to the problem

Mass displacement due to disasters and conflict is an increasing concern facing many regions around the world. Disasters and conflicts often make people lose their lives, houses, jobs and their social relationships.

In the year 2020, 82.4 million people were forcefully displaced worldwide (UNHCR, 2020). Although the novel COVID-19 pandemic dominated much of the discourse in 2020 and 2021, other extreme weather events such as drought, landslide, storms and floods were widely reported in displacing people (CRED and UNDRR, 2021). In addition, conflict situations continue to be one of the main causes of displacement. 9.8 million people were displaced due to conflict situations in the year 2020 (IDMC and NRC, 2021).

This increasing rate of forced displacement increases the level of the vulnerability of the displaced and their host communities (Cazabat, 2018; Christensen and Harild, 2009). Increasing levels of displacement are altering the living fabrics of people and placing substantial pressure on the built environment (Jayakody et al, 2021). In this context, it is important to understand the role of the built environment in addressing displacement challenges. This policy brief describes recommendations for upgrading professional competencies to address the needs of host and displaced communities.

This policy brief is a long-term effort of REGARD (REbuildinG AfteR Displacement), a project co-funded by an EU Erasmus+ programme grant, led by the University of Huddersfield's Global Disaster Resilience Centre, United Kingdom. The project consortium also included: Lund University, Sweden; University of Central Lancashire, UK; Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia; and, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. This three-year project was initiated in 2018 and set out to develop competencies in rebuilding communities following a disaster and conflict induced mass displacements from the perspective of the built environment.

The underpinning research was carried out in several stages. The research team conducted desk reviews in their respective countries. Subsequently, primary data were collected from displaced communities and experts related to the fields of displacement and built environment using methods such as interviews, sample survey and delphi. During the project period the following research activities were conducted: Eight country specific literature reviews; Two focus groups; More than 40 key informant interviews; Three delphi survey rounds with 17 experts in the field of build environment. Further information about the research process can be found in the project's other publications, which are listed in further reading.

Displacement challenges linked to built environment professions

Soon after displacement and transitional shelter

1. The increasing rate and pace of forced displacement

A mid-year report on displacement notes that conflict, violence and climate change drove displacement higher in the first half of 2021 (IDMC and NRC, 2021). However, contextual differences, policy, legal and regulatory frameworks relevant to the built environment, and how planning and design can alleviate mass displacement challenges, have not been recognised as key competencies in the built environment professions.

2. The displaced living in poor environments

The displaced living in poor environments has been recognised as a major concern (Roberto, Clara and Jorge, 2011). There is a need for adequate and appropriate housing facilities for the displaced and their hosts (Jayakody et al, 2021). These living environments must also consider the societal impacts of displacement, including language and health issues, access to education and training, transport infrastructure and services, and construction and maintenance of public buildings and spaces in mass displacement contexts.

3. Camp management and host families

Stakeholder management is important in terms of camp management and host families. While camps cannot provide permanent sustainable solutions, if they are well-managed, they can temporarily meet the human rights of displaced populations and provide them with temporary refuge (IOM, NRC and UNHCR, 2015). On the other hand, considering the perspective of host families is also important. This is especially because humanitarian actors are increasingly advocating for greater assistance to the displaced living outside camps and with host families (UNHCR, 2012).

Permanent shelter

4. Having adequate to livelihoods opportunities

Having access to livelihoods opportunities is one of the main needs of the displaced community that needs to be addressed (Goodwin-Gill and McAdam, 2017; IDMC and NRC, 2021). However, many have limited economic opportunities (Roberto, Clara and Jorge, 2011, Senanayake et al, 2022).

5. Adequate opportunities for social cohesion

The creation of an environment that promotes social cohesion between the displaced and the host communities is an essential role of the built environment (Jayakody et al., 2021). Specifically, in conflict induced displaced contexts, strategies to develop social cohesion have been recognized as the key to successful recovery from displacement (IDMC, 2019; IDMC and NRC, 2020).

6. Enhancing positive coping capacity of the displaced

Enhancing positive coping capacity of the displaced is vital. The concept of resilience is important and can be explained from three perspectives: Resilience as stability (Buffer capacity), Resilience as recovery (Bouncing back), Resilience as transformation (Creativity) (Folke, 2006). Further, the mechanisms catering for resilience should address the aspects of hazard identification, hazard mitigation, preparedness planning and recovery and rehabilitation (UN, 2004).

7. Protracted displacement

Elongated conflicts in countries increase the number of people living in protracted displacement (IDMC and NRC, 2021). Specifically, in the context of Asia, internal displacement has been interpreted as protracted and urban (IDMC, 2019). In contrast, disaster displaced communities are often forced to live in informal, temporary settlements, in unsafe housing which does not comply with building regulations, and with insecure land tenure with limited access to essential basic needs (Schofield et al., 2019). Therefore, location decisions, and infrastructure provision and management in mass displacement contexts, are vital.

8. Cultural diversity

In terms of mass displacement trends, people from various cultural backgrounds become internally displaced due to conflicts and disasters (UNHCR, 2021). It is important to understand the cultural diversity of the displaced communities (Fernando et al., 2020).

9. Inclusive society

Vulnerable groups require special attention. These include the elderly, children, people living with disabilities (mental and physical), people with chronic diseases, and single headed households (Alwang, Siegel and Jorgensen, 2001). An inclusive environment creates buildings, places and spaces that can be used easily, safely and with dignity, by all, regardless of differences (CIC, 2021).

Policy recommendations

Many of the challenges facing host and displaced communities are linked to the built environment, both soon after displacement and also for permanent shelter. Despite this, current built environment competencies do not reflect the importance of wider social, economic, cultural and disaster resilience perspectives.

The following are recommended in terms of developing professional competencies in built environment professionals. These are relevant considerations for built environment professional bodies, but also policy makers within national and international organisations who are engaged in rebuilding communities after displacement.

1. Understanding the contextual differences and dynamics of displacement in terms of nature, trends, causes, scales and geographical location of displacement
2. Considering several stages of displacement (soon after, sometime after and long time after)
3. Mainstreaming disaster management and resilience into built environment initiatives
4. Prioritising the wellbeing and the living standards of the displaced by providing relevant infrastructure (water, electricity, waste management and transportation) and access to basic needs (education and healthcare)
5. Mainstreaming the concept of Inclusive built environment to accommodate vulnerable groups
6. Incorporating cultural sensitivity into built environment interventions
7. Integrating stakeholders into built environment interventions
8. Recognising the needs of the host community
9. Creating a built environment which accommodates livelihood initiatives
10. Having a legal framework for built environment initiatives in mass displacement
11. Recognising the overall societal impacts on health and social capital of the displaced
12. Developing public spaces and buildings for recreational facilities
13. Encouraging participation of the displaced in the construction and maintenance
14. Addressing language issues in built environment interventions, both in terms of refugee integration and resettlement

Further reading

Further information about the underpinning research and outcomes can be found in the following publications developed by the project team.

REGARD project report

Amaratunga, D., Malalgoda, C., Haigh, R., Jayakody, C., Senanayake, A., Fernando, N., Hamza, M., Liyanage, C., Lill, I. & Witt, E. (2022). A built environment perspective on post-disaster and conflict-induced displacement. A report of the REGARD project: Rebuilding after Displacement. ISBN: 978-1-86218-208-0

International symposium proceedings

Hamza, M., Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R., Malalgoda, C. & Jayakody, C. (Ed.) (2021). Book of Abstracts. International Symposium on Rebuilding Communities after Displacement

Journal papers

Hamza, M. (2021). Refugees' Integration in the Built Environment: The Sweden Case. *Sustainability*, 13(22), 12812. ISSN 2071-1050

Senanayake, A., Fernando, N., Wasana, M., Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R., Malalgoda, C. & Jayakody, C. (2021) Landslide induced displacement and relocation options: A case study of owner driven settings in Sri Lanka. *Sustainability*, ISSN 2071-1050

Jayakody, C., Malalgoda, C., Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R. (2021) Addressing Housing Needs of the Displaced People Promoting Resilient and Sustainable Communities. *International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment (IJDRBE)*, (In Press)

Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R., Jayakody, C. & Malalgoda, C. (2020) Rebuilding after Forced Displacement, *The Built Environment Journal*, RICS Journals. <https://ww3.rics.org/uk/en/journals/built-environment-journal/rebuilding-after-forced-displacement-.html>

Fernando, N., Senanayake, A., Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R., Jayakody, C. (2020). Impact of the disaster-induced relocation process on the displaced communities in Kegalle district, Sri Lanka. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 16(39), 33. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2020.v16n39p33>

Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R., Jayakody, C. & Malalgoda, C. (2020) Rebuilding after Forced Displacement, *The Built Environment Journal*, RICS Journals. <https://ww3.rics.org/uk/en/journals/built-environment-journal/rebuilding-after-forced-displacement-.html>

Book chapters

Jayakody, C., Malalgoda, C., Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R., Liyanage, C., Witt, E., Hamza, M. & Fernando, N. (2021). Role of the Built Environment in Rebuilding Displaced and Host Communities. In Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R. & Dias, N. (Ed.) (2021). *Multi-Hazard Early Warning and Disaster Risks*, pp. 69-92. Springer, Cham.

Conference papers

Fernando, N., Senanayake, A., Amaratunga, D., Haigh, R., Malalgoda, C., & Jayakody, R. R. J. C. (2020, October). Disaster, Displacement and Relocation: An analysis of the needs and policy implications on a displaced community in Sri Lanka. In 10th International conference on Structural Engineering and Construction Management: Special Session on Disaster Risk Reduction (pp. 128-145). University of Peradeniya.

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